



SECRETARY OF STATE UPDATE

The Honorable John A. Gale of Nebraska

Winter 2010

Nebraska practices in line with new federal voting law

Nebraska already is in substantial compliance with a new federal law designed to eliminate obstacles to voting for military personnel and overseas civilians, according to Secretary of State John Gale.

"Being able to vote is of critical importance to American citizens, especially those in the military who are protecting our country," Gale said. "In recent years, Nebraskans in the National Guard have been serving abroad in significant numbers and on frequent deployments."

Recognizing the challenges facing military and overseas voters, Gale said, his office has taken numerous steps in past years to ensure that they receive ballots and have their ballots counted.

The Military and Overseas Voter Empowerment Act, which was passed by Congress in October 2009, received strong bipartisan support in Congress. The MOVE Act affects military personnel wherever they are stationed.

The act includes the following provisions regarding military and overseas voters:

- Requires that states provide these voters with ballots at least 45 days prior

to an election. This has been the practice in Nebraska since 2006.

- Requires that states provide electronic transmission of voter registration forms, absentee ballot requests and ballots to these voters. Nebraska law already allows such transmission. In some cases, Nebraska even allows completed ballots to be returned by e-mail or fax.

- Prohibits states from rejecting ballots for lack of a notarized signature. Nebraska does not require a notarized signature with a returned ballot.

- Requires that states

establish a free access system that will allow these voters to check the status of their ballot requests and their ballots. Gale said he looks forward to implementing such a system in Nebraska.

"My office has worked closely with the Legislature to continuously update



Secretary of State John Gale addresses a news conference in Kansas City, Mo., on Dec. 7, 2009, regarding a new federal law designed to promote voting for military personnel and overseas civilians.

our state laws to provide fair access for our military and overseas voters, which has not been the case nationwide," Gale said.

"This federal law helps assure fair and speedy access for these voters in every state," he added.



Secretary of State John Gale (right) is pictured at the Midwest Election Officials Conference with Leslie Reynolds, executive director of the National Association of Secretaries of State, and Doug Lewis, executive director of the Election Center.

Area election meeting draws from four states

Participants from Nebraska, Iowa, Kansas and Missouri learned about emerging election administration issues at the Midwest Election Officials Conference held Dec. 6-9, 2009, in Overland Park, Kan.

Nebraska Secretary of State John Gale and his counterparts in the other states – Michael Mauro of Iowa, Ron Thornburgh of Kansas and Robin Carnahan of Missouri – sponsored the conference.

The conference attracted some 300 participants, including about 40 Nebraska county election officials.

"This event is distinctive in that we get election administration officials from four neighboring states together," Gale

said. "It's a wonderful opportunity to get the four states to share information and ideas."

As part of their cooperative efforts, Nebraska, Iowa, Kansas and Missouri run checks of voter registration lists from one another to eliminate duplicate registrations.

Among the speakers at the conference were Leslie Reynolds, executive director of the National Association of Secretaries of State; Doug Lewis, executive director of the Election Center; and Doug Chapin of the Pew Center on the States.

"The feedback we got from conference participants was extremely positive," Gale noted.

Gale's office expands use of online filing of business entity reports

The Secretary of State's Office has expanded the number of business entity reports that can be filed online.

Effective Jan. 4, 2010, the office began accepting online filings of biennial occupation tax reports of domestic and foreign business corporations.

"I am excited about our progress with online filings, which can greatly ease the paperwork by business owners and can significantly ease the burden of paperwork handled by my office," said Secretary of State John Gale.

He noted that there were 43,347 domestic business corporations and 10,271 foreign business corporations registered in Nebraska in 2008.

Annual reports of limited liability partnerships also may be filed online in 2010. The office initiated online filings of these reports in 2009.

The online filings can be done by accessing www.sos.ne.gov. Payment for the online filings may be made by credit card or electronic check.

"The use of electronic government has multiple benefits," Gale said.

"It is quick and free of postal delivery issues; it makes our services equally and immediately accessible to citizens from Harrison to Falls City; and it reduces costs of document storage by eliminating paper forms as well as the need for additional state employees to handle growth of business filings."

Limited liability companies were able to file their biennial reports online in 2009. Biennial reports for nonprofit corporations are scheduled for conversion to online service in 2011.

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Nate Dobbs wins employee of year honors

Nate Dobbs has been named the employee of the year for the Secretary of State's Office.

Dobbs, an election specialist, was honored during state government's employee recognition month during October 2009.

In addition, three employees of the Secretary of State's Office were honored for their length of service during the recognition month.

For the Administration Division, Dale Arp was recognized for 20 years of service and Shelley Harrold was recognized for 10 years of service. Mary Ott of the Records Management Division was honored for 10 years of service.

Dobbs, a University of Arizona graduate, has worked for the Elections Division since January 2007. He was cited for his exceptional performance and creative thinking.

Dobbs and other state government employees were honored at a State Capitol ceremony on Oct. 26, 2009.



Nate Dobbs was honored as the employee of the year for the Secretary of State's Office. Dobbs (left) is pictured with Gov. Dave Heineman at a recognition ceremony at the State Capitol.

'Cactus Jack' entertains at nature event



Secretary of State John Gale was the featured speaker at the Enchanted Trail event on Oct. 3, 2009, at the Olson Nature Preserve near Albion in central Nebraska. Portraying "Cactus Jack," Gale discussed Nebraska's pioneer past and prospects of the state's future. Gale originated the pioneer character for his Nebraska statehood birthday parties for elementary school students.

Office produces election training video

The Secretary of State's Office got a taste of Hollywood with the production of a training video for poll workers.

Becky Richter and Nate Dobbs of the office's Elections Division coordinated the making of "A Day in the Life of a Nebraska Poll Worker." The 42-minute video covers all aspects of operating a polling place.

"Having professional and knowledgeable poll workers is crucial to the success of elections," Secretary of State John Gale said. "We believe that the video will be an extremely useful method in training poll workers throughout the state."

DVDs of the video will be distributed to all Nebraska county election offices.

The video was created by NET Television, and Joel Geyer served as the producer for the project.



ANET Television crew films Phil Hickman and Vera Mae Lutz, who portray poll workers, in the poll worker training video made for the Secretary of State's Office.

The \$50,000 cost of the project was paid for by a grant from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

The video was designed with people with disabilities in mind. It includes a segment on assisting voters with disabilities and contains captions for people with hearing disabilities.

The video also may be used for school or community groups to educate people on the election process.

Gale presents civics award to Lincoln teacher

Lincoln teacher Scott Bendler is the 2009 recipient of the Civics Recognition Award presented by Secretary of State John Gale for exemplary efforts to enhance civics education.

Bendler teaches social studies at Lincoln's Bryan Community, an alternative high school. He is in his 27th year of teaching, including 15 years at Bryan Community.

The award was presented July 21, 2009, at a Lancaster County Board meeting.

Gale cited Bendler for his ambitious efforts to bring civics education to life for his students.

One of Bendler's initiatives is "Life Stories," an intergenerational oral history project. Students research, interview and produce video segments on the life stories of senior citizens.

Bendler stresses the importance of the election system to students. He brings students to the election office so they can observe the early-voting process and vote if they are eligible. He also en-



Lincoln teacher Scott Bendler (center), recipient of the Civics Recognition Award, is pictured with Secretary of State John Gale (left) and Lancaster County Election Commissioner David Shively.

courages students to participate as election workers.

Bendler was nominated for the award by Lancaster County Election Commissioner David Shively.

Office expands online agricultural lien filings

More agricultural lien records in Nebraska can now be filed online, according to Secretary of State John Gale.

Effective Nov. 9, 2009, Gale's office began accepting Effective Financing Statement (EFS) original filings online. Original filings join terminations and continuations as EFS documents that can be filed electronically.

For the time being, EFS amendments must be done with paper records. An online service for amendments will be added in the future, Gale said.

"This latest move meets two of my goals of office – to increase online services and to make it easier to conduct business in Nebraska," Gale said.

EFS filings provide public notice of security interests held by lenders on crops and livestock.

Lenders regularly make loans on crops and livestock and secure those loans with a lien filing.

The Secretary of State's Office issues a master lien list every quarter to interested parties that identifies the EFS filings of record.

Workshop focuses on 2010 election matters

The Secretary of State's Office helped Nebraska county election officials get an early start on preparing for the statewide primary and general elections in 2010.

The office's Elections Division sponsored a workshop on Oct. 28, 2009, in Grand Island that focused on the 2010 election cycle. The workshop was attended by about 135 county election officials.

"The workshop was a great opportunity to address in a single setting a number of issues regarding the 2010 elections," said Becky Richter, the division's assistant manager. "The workshop was well attended, and the county election officials appreciated receiving such comprehensive information."

Among the topics covered at the workshop were election legislation, the statewide voter registration system, vote tabulation matters and poll worker training.

Nebraska stamp will be released in 2010

Nebraska will be in the national spotlight with a new postage stamp that features the state flag and a center-pivot irrigation system.

The 44-cent Nebraska stamp is part of the U.S. Postal Service's series, "Flags of Our Nation." The Nebraska stamp will go on sale in April 2010.

"The Nebraska stamp offers a great opportunity to promote our state flag and the importance of agriculture and irrigation to our state," said Secretary of State John Gale.

The state flag has deep ties to the Secretary of State's Office.

The flag consists of a reproduction of the Great Seal of the State of Nebraska, charged on the center in gold and silver, on a field of blue.

The Nebraska Constitution provides that the secretary of state is the keeper of the Great Seal, which dates back to 1867.



The Nebraska stamp is part of the U.S. Postal Service's series, "Flags of Our Nation."

The state flag was designated by legislation action in 1925. The original state flag hangs in Gale's private office in the State Capitol.

"Because of the office's historical bonds with the Great Seal and the state flag, it's exciting to see the release of the Nebraska stamp," Gale said.

Under the "Flags of Our Nation" series, which began in 2008, each state gets a prominent rendering of its flag and a scene meant to be a snapshot of life in each state.

Gale announces three staffing appointments

Secretary of State John Gale has made three personnel changes to his senior staff.

J.P. Green, a Kentucky native, joined the staff in August 2009 as assistant secretary of state. His duties include legislative affairs, policy matters, implementation of office goals, event planning and international relations.

Previously, he worked in the Washington, D.C., area for 12 years, including service as a U.S. Senate staff member and an executive branch appointee.

Judy Jobman was named chief deputy, effective Sept. 1, 2009, and will serve as acting secretary of state in Gale's absence. She will retain her title as deputy of the Business Services Division.

Cathy Danahy, who has worked in the Records Management Division since 1993, was named deputy of the division, effective Aug. 1, 2009. She will retain her title as executive director of the Nebraska State Records Board.